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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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SUBJECT: CARE OF THE PRESSURE CANNER. This talk is from home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Now that your kitchen is in war production, your pressure canner is important equipment helping to boost the food supply of the nation. But if you want to keep your canner producing, give it careful handling both on and off duty, because it's made of precious war materials... metal and rubber.

The home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say the first step in taking care of your canner is to understand how it works. Their advice is to read and understand the directions that come with the canner. Know the name of each part, and understand the job of each part. The new wartime models are made of tinned steel or porcelain enameled steel. They may operate differently than the pre-war canners made of aluminum. But no matter what kind you have, study the instructions, and know how to operate your canner.

The gage is a very important part of your canner, because it shows the pressure inside the canner. If the gage doesn't tell you the truth about the pressure, you may cook your food too long, or not long enough. So make sure the gage is accurate. Take it to someone who can check it against a master gage or a maximum thermometer----the home demonstration agent of the county agricultural Extension Service or the home management supervisor of the Farm Security Administration can do this for you.

A clean canner works better and last longer than one that isn't clean. Three important points to check when you're cleaning your canner are the openings to the pet cock, the safety valve, and the pressure gage. If these openings are clogged with dried food or dust or dirt, the canner won't work right.

Clean these openings by running a toothpick or a string through them. And at least once every canning season, take off the pet cock and the safety valve, and soak them in vinegar for a little while.

Another thing - see that your canner is clean where the kettle and the cover join. Steam will escape around these edges unless they're perfectly clean.

To make sure your canner closes tight, clean the edges of the lid and the kettle with a mild scouring powder. But don't put the lid in water. If you do, you may damage the pressure gage.

You know grease rots rubber, so if your canner, has a rubber gasket, keep the gasket wiped clean.

Now for some suggestions on operating your pressure canner. Of course you'll follow the instructions that came with it. But here are a few precautions that will safeguard your canner, and you too:

For one thing, be sure you put enough water in the canner at the start, so it won't boil dry. An inch of water is a good level...or, you can put in a little more if your canner leaks a bit around the edge of the cover.

Another thing: adjust the heat under your canner so the pressure will rise rapidly. But don't let the flame come up high against the sides of the canner. Direct heat is bad for any metal that's unprotected by water, and it's especially hard on tinned or porcelain enameled steel.

Remember that any sudden cooling of your canner is likely to warp the metal or crack the enameled steel. So never try to cool your canner by running cold water over it, or by setting it in cold water. And if the canner boils dry, never add water while it's hot. Let it cool a few minutes, then refill it with hot water.

And here are some "don'ts" about using your pressure canner: Don't pry the cover loose. Don't chip or nick the edges of the kettle, or the cover. If you do, you'll ruin the seal that holds steam inside the canner.

When you're canning with glass jars, be sure to remember two important things: First, don't open the pet cock until the pressure is down to zero. And second, release the steam from the pet cock gradually. These are both important for your own safety. If you open the pet cock suddenly, or before the pressure inside the canner has dropped to zero, you'll pull liquid out of the jars...you may break the jars..and you may get hurt as the steam rushes out.

Another precaution to take for your own safety: When you take the cover off the canner, lift the back edge off first. Then, if there's any steam still inside the canner, it will escape without touching your arms and face.

Your pressure canner needs good care even when you're not using it. Before you store it away on the shelf, wash it thoroughly to remove any food or salt deposits on the surface of the canner. These deposits will pit aluminum, and they may spoil the glaze on enamel, and rust tinned steel. Make sure you've thoroughly cleaned the edges of the kettle and the cover, and the pet cock, pressure gage, safety valve, and rubber gasket.

After you've washed and dried the canner, smear a thin film of vaseline on the threads of the screw locks. Then put crumpled newspapers inside the kettle, and wrap the cover in paper and put it upside-down on top of the kettle. Never store the canner with the cover right side up.

If you'll follow these suggestions, your canner should give you years of good service.

You know the home economists of the Department of Agriculture recommend canning non-acid vegetables, such as string beans, peas, and corn, in a pressure canner. With canners so hard to get, some of your neighbors would probably appreciate the opportunity of using yours. So be a good neighbor, and share your canner. Just make sure your friends know how to operate the canner, and warn them to wash it thoroughly when they've finished with it. Maybe the best thing would be for you to help them with their canning. Then you'll be sure they won't hurt themselves or your canner.

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